

AIM: My Life Journey/My Path

Supporting Guidance

Introduction

My Life Journey is a collaborative tool designed to help children and young people tell the story of their lives in a way that is meaningful to them. It provides a visual and engaging way of exploring important experiences, relationships, achievements, challenges and life events, whilst also recognising the thoughts, feelings and meanings attached to those experiences.

Unlike a traditional chronology, My Life Journey is not simply a timeline of events. Rather than recording what happened and when, it encourages practitioners to understand what mattered, why it mattered, and how those experiences may have shaped the child's development, relationships, behaviour and identity.

Children's lives are increasingly experienced across both physical and digital environments. Relationships, friendships, identity, learning, leisure activities, achievements, adversity and harmful experiences may occur online, offline or across both contexts. My Life Journey should therefore encourage exploration of the child's whole world, recognising that digital experiences are often just as meaningful and influential as those that occur face-to-face. Similarly, practitioners should recognise that children with learning disabilities, autism, ADHD and other neurodevelopmental differences may experience, organise and communicate their life journeys differently. The process should always be adapted to meet the individual communication, cognitive and developmental needs of the child.

The completed Life Journey helps practitioners develop a richer understanding of the child as a whole person. It supports exploration of strengths, resilience, protective factors, vulnerabilities and significant developmental experiences and, where relevant, places harmful sexual behaviour within the wider context of the child's life rather than viewing it in isolation.

Importantly, this is the child's journey. It belongs to them. There is no right or wrong way to complete it. Practitioners are encouraged to be flexible, creative and curious, allowing the child to decide what feels important and how they would like to tell their story.

Why use My Life Journey?

The purpose of My Life Journey is to help practitioners:

- build engagement and develop a trusting working relationship;
- understand the child's lived experiences rather than simply recording events;
- explore the meaning and significance of important life experiences from the child's perspective;
- identify strengths, protective factors and sources of resilience alongside adversity and challenge;
- recognise patterns, turning points and periods of change throughout the child's development;
- understand the child's experiences across both their offline and digital worlds, recognising the influence of both on their development, relationships and wellbeing.
- understand the context within which harmful sexual behaviour, or other behaviours of concern, may have emerged;
- support collaborative formulation and intervention planning; and
- provide a shared understanding that informs the AIM3 Assessment.

Ultimately, My Life Journey moves practitioners away from asking "What happened?" towards asking:

- What was this like for you?
- How did you make sense of it?
- How did you feel?
- What changed afterwards?
- What helped?
- How might this help us understand where you are today?

My Life Journey is more than a chronology. Chronologies are important for recording factual events, but they rarely tell us how a child experienced those events.

Example: Parents separated when the child was 8 years old. Whilst this tells us what happened, it tells us very little about the child's experience. Using My Life Journey, practitioners should become curious about questions such as:

- What did this mean to the child?
- How did they feel?
- What were they thinking?
- What changed afterwards?
- Who supported them?

- How did this affect relationships?
- Is this something they still think about today?

Sometimes events adults consider highly significant have very little meaning for a child. Equally, experiences that appear relatively minor to adults can have a profound impact on how a child sees themselves, other people and the world around them. Understanding the meaning of events is often far more important than simply recording that they occurred.

How does My Life Journey inform the AIM3 Assessment?

My Life Journey provides the foundation for gathering information to inform the AIM3 Assessment. AIM3 is a holistic, dynamic assessment framework that considers harmful sexual behaviour within the context of the child's wider life, recognising the interaction between developmental, relational, behavioural and environmental factors. It is designed to support practitioners in understanding both the sexual and non-sexual needs the behaviour may be meeting and to inform formulation, intervention and safety planning.

Practitioners should use My Life Journey to develop a broad understanding of the child's experiences. As the assessment progresses, the information gathered through My Life Journey will naturally inform thinking across all five AIM3 Domains and support the practitioner in analysis and understanding of that information.

Information gathered through My Life Journey should reflect the child's whole lived experience, including family life, education, friendships, community, culture, online activity, significant relationships and important developmental experiences. Practitioners should remain curious about how experiences across different contexts interact and influence one another. For many children, particularly adolescents, online relationships and experiences may be equally as significant as those occurring face-to-face and should therefore be explored with the same level of curiosity and attention.

Importantly, information belongs to the child not to a Domain. The Domains provide different lenses through which practitioners analyse that information. For example, a parental separation might contribute to understanding:

- attachment experiences and developmental needs within the Developmental Domain;
- changes in parenting, stability or family functioning within the Environmental/Family Domain;
- emotional regulation or coping within the Self-Regulation Domain;

- changes in peer relationships or behaviour within the Non-Sexual Behaviour Domain; and
- where relevant, changes surrounding the emergence or maintenance of harmful sexual behaviour within the Sexual Behaviour Domain.

The event itself is not what is being analysed. Instead, practitioners are considering how that experience influenced the child's development, relationships, behaviour, coping strategies and current presentation.

Similarly, information about strengths and protective factors gathered through My Life Journey should inform formulation across multiple Domains, ensuring that the assessment reflects both areas of concern and the child's existing resilience and resources.

My Life Journey therefore provides a continuous thread throughout the AIM3 Assessment, supporting practitioners to develop evidence-informed formulations, understand the child's pathway, identify intervention needs and develop proportionate, individualised safety planning. AIM3 is intended as a holistic, dynamic framework rather than a simple risk rating tool, with information integrated across its five domains to understand the child's overall presentation and changing needs.

Completing My Life Journey

Begin with Curiosity

Explain that this is their story and there are no right or wrong answers. It is up to them to decide what feels important enough to include. Explain that there are many different ways to tell a story. Some children may enjoy talking, whilst others may prefer drawing, writing, using photographs, symbols, objects, maps or digital examples. There is no expectation that every child communicates in the same way. Adapt the process to suit the child's communication style, developmental level and individual strengths.

Follow the Child's Lead

There is no expectation that the journey is completed chronologically. Many children remember events through associations rather than dates, moving naturally backwards and forwards through time. Others may organise memories around particular people, places, interests or emotions.

Children with learning disabilities or neurodivergence may recall events differently again, perhaps focusing on routines, sensory memories, favourite interests or specific details rather than broader narratives. Practitioners should adapt their approach

accordingly, recognising that differences in communication or memory organisation are not indicators of engagement or understanding.

The purpose is understanding the child's journey, not producing a linear timeline. The journey should also remain a live document that can be revisited throughout assessment or intervention as new memories, reflections or experiences emerge.

Explore meaning, not simply events.

Whenever an event is added, consider exploring:

- Why is this important to you?
- What do you remember most?
- What was happening at the time?
- What were you thinking?
- How did you feel?
- What changed afterwards?
- Who helped?
- What did you need?
- Is this something you still think about today?

Remember to explore experiences across all areas of the child's life, including their online world. Important friendships, gaming communities, social media experiences, online achievements, digital creativity, experiences of bullying, exclusion, exploitation or technology-facilitated harmful sexual behaviour may all represent significant life events from the child's perspective.

Capture thoughts and feelings alongside significant life events, encourage children to explore: **thoughts; feelings; hopes; worries; beliefs about themselves; beliefs about other people; coping strategies; and what helped them feel safe or supported.**

Some children may find it easier to express emotions through visual or concrete methods rather than conversation. Thought bubbles, speech bubbles, emojis, colour coding, photographs, symbols, objects, emotion cards or scaling exercises may support children who communicate differently, including many children with learning disabilities or neurodevelopmental differences.

Remember Strengths

My Life Journey should never become a catalogue of difficulties, challenges or 'risks'. Be equally curious about: **achievements; talents; interests; important relationships; moments of pride; happy memories; successes; acts of kindness; hopes; aspirations; and positive online communities, friendships and interests.**

Children's online worlds are often important sources of belonging, achievement and identity, as well as potential areas of vulnerability so ensure both are explored equally.

Notice Behaviours

As the journey develops habits, patterns or repetition may begin to emerge.

For example:

- changes in family relationships;
- school transitions;
- trauma or loss;
- friendship difficulties;
- emotional distress;
- increasing isolation;
- significant achievements;
- periods of stability;
- the emergence of harmful sexual behaviour;
- periods where positive change occurred;
- changes in online activity or friendships;
- increased time spent online;
- changes in gaming or social media use; or
- periods of online isolation or increased online support.

These observations should inform curiosity and formulation rather than assumptions.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Harmful sexual behaviour should be incorporated as one part of the child's wider story, rather than becoming the defining feature of it.

Explore:

What else was happening in the child's life at that time? This should include consideration of both offline and online contexts;

- What needs might the behaviour have been meeting?
- What changed afterwards?
- What has helped since?
- What strengths have supported positive change?

This encourages practitioners to understand behaviour within its wider developmental, relational and environmental context.

Conversational Prompts for Professionals

Tell me about yourself

- What makes you, you?
- What are you proud of?
- What do you enjoy?
- What 3 things would you say about yourself?

Important People

- Who matters most to you?
- Who has helped you?
- Who makes you feel safe?
- Who has been important at different times in your life?

Home and Family

- Tell me about where you've lived.
- Who do you live with?
- Have there been any big changes?
- What was that like?

School/Education

- What have you enjoyed?
- What has been difficult?
- Who has helped you?
- How do you feel about school?

Friends

- Tell me about your friends.
- What makes a good friend?
- Who do you enjoy spending time with?
- Are there people you mainly know online?
- Do you play games or chat with people online?
- Are there any online groups or communities that are important to you?
- Have any important things happened online?

My Digital World

- What apps, games or websites do you enjoy?
- What do you like doing online?
- Who do you spend time with online?
- Has anything really good happened online?
- Has anything upset, worried or frightened you online?
- Are there online experiences that you think are important enough to be part of your journey?
- Has your online world changed over time?

Important Life Events

- What are your happiest memories?
- What has been difficult?
- What moments changed your life?
- Thoughts and feelings
- What were you thinking?
- How did you feel?
- What helped?
- What did you need?

Looking Ahead

- What are you hoping for?
- What would you like the next part of your journey to look like?
- If things could be just a little bit better, what might that look like?
- Would you like to feel or do anything differently?

Adapting the Activity

Children will complete My Life Journey in different ways. Consider: using photographs; drawing together; using symbols or objects; incorporating favourite interests; using timelines alongside pictures; breaking the activity into shorter sessions; allowing additional processing time; reducing abstract language; using emotion cards or visual feeling scales; checking understanding regularly; and revisiting sections over several sessions.

The aim is not for every child to complete the activity in the same way, but for every child to have an equal opportunity to share their story in a manner that is meaningful and accessible to them.

Remember...the objective is not to complete a 'perfect' timeline but to understand the child.

Be curious. Listen. Allow silence. Follow the child's lead. Be prepared to revisit the journey as trust develops.

Most importantly, remember that this is the **child's** story. The most meaningful Life Journeys are those that children and young people feel they have created themselves, supported by a practitioner who is genuinely interested in understanding not only what has happened, but what those experiences have meant and how they continue to influence the child's life today.